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SIPDIS  
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SUBJECT: DRAFT BANGLADESH PART I FOR 2007-2008 INTERNATIONAL  
NARCOTICS CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT (INCSR)

11. (U) The following is the draft text on Bangladesh of the first part (drugs and chemical control) for the 2008-2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report:

12. (U) I. Summary: There was no evidence that Bangladesh was a significant cultivator or producer of narcotics. Government of Bangladesh (GOB) officials charged with controlling and preventing illegal substance trafficking lacked training, equipment, continuity of leadership, and other resources to detect and interdict the flow of drugs. Corruption at all levels of government traditionally has hampered the country's drug interdiction efforts. Law-enforcement officials initially said an anti-graft campaign launched by the Caretaker Government had made efforts to prosecute politically connected drug dealers easier. The anti-graft push, however, slowed toward the end of 2008 as courts released scores of corruption suspects on bail and stayed many cases. Bangladesh is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

13. (U) II. Status of Country: The country's porous borders made the illegal flow of narcotics from neighboring countries easy and made Bangladesh an attractive transfer point for drugs transiting the region. Assessments conducted by several U.S. agencies in 2008 found numerous land, sea and air border security vulnerabilities in Bangladesh that could be easily exploited by narcotics traffickers. The Bangladesh Department of Narcotics Control said it did not have an estimate for the number of drug addicts in the country. The number of drug users had been estimated unofficially at between 100,000 and 1.7 million, with 20,000-25,000 injecting drug users and 45,000 heroin smokers, indicating by the wide range of the estimate the lack of any real knowledge of the extent of drug abuse. Other drugs used in Bangladesh were methamphetamines, marijuana, and the codeine-based cough syrup phensidyl. After years of unwillingness to recognize narcotics issues, the country's law enforcement bodies took a stance against drugs in 2006, largely due to two factors: high-profile cases of heroin smuggling to the United Kingdom in 2005 and growing methamphetamine (locally, Thai "yaba" tablets which consist of caffeine and methamphetamine ) use among the young elite.

14. (U) III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2006: Policy Initiatives. Efforts to create a coordinated government response to counter narcotics abuse appeared to founder in 2008. Although government officials said in 2007 a new interagency monitoring group had been created, the Home Affairs Ministry said in October 2008 no such agency existed.

15. (U) Law Enforcement Efforts. Law enforcement units engaged in operations to counter narcotics included the police, the DNC, the border defense forces known as the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), customs, the navy, the coast guard, local magistrates and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite group that played a leading role in fighting terrorism, corruption and narcotics abuse. Customs, the navy, the coast guard and the DNC all suffered from poor funding, inadequate equipment, understaffing and lack of training. For example, the DNC budget for 2008-2009 was a paltry 184 million taka (about \$2.6 million), only slightly more than the actual expenditure

for the previous fiscal year. Its work force of about 900 people also was 375 positions short of the number of positions approved by the government. There was no DNC presence at the international airports in Chittagong and Sylhet and only two at Dhaka airport, and DNC officers throughout the country were not authorized to carry weapons. Although RAB had become perhaps the highest-profile anti-narcotics force in the country, it did not have a special counter-narcotics section. Its drug-fighting resources, which appeared stronger than other law-enforcement agencies, included a recently expanded canine corps of 51 dogs.

¶6. (U) Law Enforcement Efforts continued: The DNC kept tabs primarily on seizures by its own officers. Drugs seized by the department from January through September 2008 (latest statistics) are as follows: 23.8 kg of heroin (compared to 16.3 kg in all of 2006 and 20.9 kg in 2007); 1,824 kg of marijuana (compared to 1,345 kg in 2006 and 1,768 kg in 2007); more than 41,000 bottles of phensidyl, a codeine-based, highly addictive cough syrup produced in India; 226 ampoules of pethedine, an injectable opiate with medical application as an anesthetic; and 4,858 tablets of yaba. Meanwhile, RAB reported its seizures of phensidyl were way up in 2008, while seizures of yaba were way down. RAB said in the first 10 months of 2008 it seized 299,746 bottles of phensidyl (up from more than 80,000 for the same period in 2007); 15,104 tablets of yaba (down from nearly 133,000 tablets a year earlier, almost all of which came in one Dhaka raid); and 32 kilograms of heroin (19.8 kilograms a year earlier).

¶7. (U) Corruption. The Caretaker Government that came to power in January 2007 made fighting the country's endemic corruption a top priority. As of September 2008, 97 people were convicted out of 512 graft cases. Between July 14 and September 8, judges granted bail to 158 suspects and stayed 88 cases. Many feared the fight against graft was losing steam as the Caretaker Government prepared for the

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end of its tenure in late 2008. The GOB did not, as a matter of government policy, encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of drugs or controlled substances or launder proceeds from their transactions. No senior official had been identified as engaging in, encouraging, or facilitating the production or distribution of drugs or controlled substances.

¶8. (U) Agreements and Treaties. Bangladesh is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Bangladesh acceded to the UN Convention against Corruption in February 2007. The GOB and USG signed a Letter of Agreement on Law Enforcement and Narcotics Control (LOA) in September 2002 under which the U.S. provides equipment and technical assistance to the DNC and its central chemical laboratory. The LOA also provided for training, via the U.S. Department of Justice, to law enforcement personnel involved in counter-narcotics activities.

¶9. (U) Cultivation/Production. The International Narcotics Control Board estimated small quantities of cannabis are cultivated in Bangladesh for local use. The DNC acknowledged that some small amount of cannabis is cultivated in the hill tracts near Chittagong, in the southern silt islands, and in the northeastern region, claiming it is for local consumption. The DNC also reported that as soon as knowledge of a cannabis crop reached its officers, that crop was destroyed in concert with law enforcement agencies. The DNC said there were no significant crop destruction activities in the first 10 months of 2008.

¶10. (U) Drug Flow/Transit. There were few media reports of major narcotics seizures in the first 10 months of 2008. Local media reported a huge seizure of heroin and other narcotics at Zia International Airport in Dhaka in April, but Government officials later confirmed that testing found the seized materials were not illegal substances. Subsequent news articles identified the seized goods as legal food supplements.

¶11. (U) Drug Flow/Transit continued: The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2007 report cited evidence that "heroin consignments destined for Europe are increasingly passing through Bangladesh." It said heroin was smuggled into Bangladesh by courier from Pakistan, by commercial vehicle or trains from India, by truck or public transport from Burma and by sea via the Bay of Bengal. The

Chittagong seaport appeared to be the main exit point for narcotics leaving Bangladesh, the report added. Bangladesh Navy officials said they suspected Bangladesh was a transit zone for heroin smuggled out of the Golden Crescent in South Asia and the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia.

¶12. (U) Drug Flow/Transit continued: Several recent U.S. government assessments found great vulnerabilities along Bangladesh's land, sea and air borders. One report from the Department of Homeland Security described a chaotic situation at Benapole, the main land border crossing between India and Bangladesh, which could easily be exploited by narcotics traffickers. The report said the main concern of customs officers at Zia International Airport in Dhaka appeared to be a desire not to inconvenience passengers. Examination of luggage items was said to be cursory at best. Opium-based pharmaceuticals and other medicinal drugs are being smuggled into Bangladesh from India. White (injectable) heroin comes in from Burma.

¶13. (U) Domestic Programs (Demand Reduction). Law enforcement officials believed that drug abuse, while previously a problem among the ultra-poor, was becoming a major problem among the wealthy and well-educated young. The Department of Narcotics Control ran treatment centers in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Jessore and Comilla. In the nine months through September 2008, 3,120 patients received treatment at the government facilities, the vast majority of them being male. That appeared to confirm a trend of dwindling numbers of patients, which totaled nearly 5,000 for all of 2007, about 6,000 in 2006 and more than 9,000 in 2005. A drug addicts' rehabilitation organization, APON, operates five long-term residential rehabilitation centers, including the first center in Bangladesh for the rehabilitation of female addicts (opened in 2005). APON says it is the only organization that includes street children in its drug rehabilitation program.

¶14. (U) Domestic Programs (Demand Reduction) continued: The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2007 report said prescription controls in Bangladesh were not adequately enforced at the retail level. It said pharmaceutical preparations were stolen from both hospitals and pharmacies.

¶15. (U) IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs: Bilateral Cooperation. The USG continued to support Bangladesh's counter-narcotics efforts. The U.S. Government provided 2,100 drug identification kits to several enforcement agencies, including the Department of Narcotics Control, the Bangladesh Criminal Investigation Department of Police and the Rapid Action Battalion. The kits allowed law enforcement personnel in the field to quickly test substances for methamphetamine, ecstasy, marijuana and opiates.

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The U.S. Embassy in Dhaka also provided a grant of \$52,000 to APON for a new rehabilitation center for female drug addicts.

¶16. (U) The Road Ahead. The USG will continue to provide law enforcement and forensic training for GOB officials, much of which will be useful to Bangladesh's counter-narcotics efforts. New Delhi-based Drug Enforcement Agency officials visited Dhaka in August 2008 to liaise with Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies about future counter-narcotics cooperation.